

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Montana's Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 60 Min

Background: Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is an always-fatal neurologic disease like mad cow disease that affects deer, elk, moose and caribou. It usually takes 1½ - 2 years from animal infection to death. Given enough time, perhaps decades, to infect a large portion of a herd ($\geq 20\%$), CWD can cause population declines of $\geq 30\%$. There are no known risks to livestock or humans. To date, there are no known cases of CWD in the wild in Montana, but it is nearby in all the surrounding states and provinces except Idaho and British Columbia. It is only a matter of time before it is found in Montana. Previous plans have spoken to general CWD management, but have not laid out specific actions and who is responsible for those actions. FWP has developed a three-part action-specific plan for surveillance for CWD, a management response to finding it, and a plan to inform the public about the disease, the risk it poses to Montana's wildlife, and the necessary actions to manage it. These specific actions are covered by environmental assessments (EA) from 2005 and 2013.

Surveillance will sample animals at hunter check stations in areas where CWD is closest to our borders. Because FWP does not have enough money or staff to look for CWD everywhere in the state, the Department will annually rotate through high-priority areas in south-central, southeast and northern Montana. When CWD is found, FWP will need to find out its prevalence in the local herd and the geographical extent of the infection. Since there are no reliable tests for live animals, the Department proposes to use public hunting to sample animals in a Special CWD Hunt within about a 10-mile radius around the initial detection called the Initial Response Area (IRA). FWP may have to sample about 150 – 300-plus animals to accurately determine disease prevalence, depending on the size of the local herd. The plan also speaks to the long-term management of the area, which will depend on the prevalence and distribution found during the Special CWD Hunt. Perhaps the most important part is a public information plan to inform and educate hunters, landowners, political office holders and the public about the very real risk CWD poses to our wildlife and economy, and how the Department proposes to manage it.

Public Involvement Process & Results: This detailed plan was developed by FWP's internal CWD Action Team and thoroughly vetted with a CWD Citizen Advisory Panel. This 12-person panel includes at least one person from each FWP region and represents a diversity of backgrounds including conservation organizations like the Mule Deer Foundation, ranchers, livestock animal scientists, veterinarians, sportsmen, and others. The team have met for three 2-day meetings to learn about CWD, what other states are doing, and to review and comment on early drafts of the plan. All the meetings have been open to the public with an opportunity to comment. If endorsed for public comment at this meeting, the plan will be available for comment for 30 days and a final product presented to the Commission for action at its February meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis: Without a specific plan to look for, respond to and inform the public about CWD FWP will be ill-prepared to manage a disease that can have a substantial impact on Montana's wildlife and economy.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the draft Montana CWD Management Plan be made available for public comment.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission authorize the Department to release for public comment, the draft Montana Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan as proposed by FWP.